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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000577

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY STRESSES TO FM SPANTA ITS CONTINUED
AFGHANISTAN COMMITMENT

REF: ANKARA 567

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 b, d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Afghan FM Spanta, visiting Ankara March 18, did not ask for more troops from Turkey, saying it was a NATO decision. He did, however, ask for more military training. Turkey is prepared to respond; FM Babacan will take up the issue with the Turkish General Staff (TGS). Spanta also urged Turkey to resume the Ankara process with Presidents Musharraf and Karzai. President Musharraf is awaiting the formation of a new Pakistani government to confirm his participation; the summit is now expected in May. Meanwhile, the GOT continues to urge Pakistani politicians to set aside their opposition to Musharraf and focus on the security and stability of the country. Babacan is preparing to visit Pakistan, preferably before the next Ankara summit. Uzbek warlord Dostum did not, reportedly, figure directly in Spanta's discussions, but the Turks believe Dostum has been strengthened by the Karzai government's threats to arrest or exile him. END SUMMARY.

TURKEY PREPARING TO INCREASE AFGHAN SECURITY
AND MILITARY TRAINING ASSISTANCE

¶2. (C) Turkey is prepared to increase its presence in Afghanistan, Babacan told Spanta during a 2.5 hour meeting at MFA, MFA Pakistan/Afghanistan Section Head Ilhan Sener told us March 24. Spanta -- who was also received by President Gul -- asked for more military training, reportedly telling Babacan that Afghanistan trusts Turkey completely and would send its cadets there without hesitation. Sener expects the GOT will make an announcement about increased training for Afghan forces, both in Afghanistan and Turkey, at the Bucharest NATO summit in April. Particular ideas include Turkey sending additional Operational Mentoring Liaison Teams (OMLTs) and building a military training center in Afghanistan. Turkey is also considering resuming command of the ISAF Kabul region, which it only recently handed over to Italy, as well as other unspecified operational responsibilities within ISAF. Sener did not have more details, noting that MFA still needed to work through these issues with TGS. Spanta also requested that Turkey participate in the Paris-hosted Afghanistan conference planned for June, according to Sener. Spanta reportedly told Babacan that two dates have been proposed, June 5-6 and June 15-16, and that Secretary Rice is supposedly planning to attend. Babacan told Spanta that he plans to be in the United States June 5-6, but will consider GOT participation for either date. Gul might even attend, according to Sener.

13. (C) Sener stressed that there was no space between MFA and TGS on what Turkish ISAF troops can and cannot do in Afghanistan; Turkish troops will not engage in combat operations anywhere in Afghanistan. He described the Turkish mission to Afghanistan as focused on health, education and agricultural assistance, listing oft-cited statistics on the thousands of Afghans served by Turkish projects there. Turkey, he went on, is already fighting terrorism at home (and in Iraq) and is involved in numerous peace-keeping operations around the world. "We will not kill a single Afghan there; we have a reputation to uphold," he said.

14. (C) Spanta told the Turks that their contribution to Afghanistan is vital, Afghan Ambassador Mesud Halili told us March 26. The Ambassador said the two sides explored a number of proposals for bolstering Turkey's education, cultural and medical assistance. FM Spanta reportedly asked Turkey to expand existing hospital services and increased medical training, increase the number of scholarships provided to Afghans from 150 to 500, and encouraged Turkey to follow-through on its earlier proposal to build a Turkish university in Kabul. He also reportedly asked the Turks to become more engaged in infrastructure projects, arguing that local communities do not have the same level of confidence in Iranian and Pakistani contractors. Halili said the two sides agreed to suspend visa requirements for diplomatic passport holders; the policy should be implemented within fifteen days.

15. (C) While Spanta side-stepped the issue of troop levels and how Turkish forces should be utilized, Halili told us that, as Ambassador, he constantly urges the GOT to reconsider its policy of not engaging in combat operations

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against Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan. Even a small contingent of Turkish troops actively fighting the Taliban would have a huge impact on the success of NATO operations there, he believes. Fighting the Taliban would underscore for the Afghan people that the Taliban is an enemy of Turkey, consolidating public opinion against the Taliban. It would further send a clear message to Pakistan and Central Asian countries: assistance you directly or indirectly provide to terrorist insurgents could harm Turkish forces. Pakistan, for one, could not allow it, he said. Halili also opined that the esteem with which Afghans view Turks could be better leveraged by the U.S. and NATO. While Turkey does not have the resources to train and equip an army, he suggested that we should carry out more of our Afghan military training through Turks. A strong and identifiable Turkish association with the Afghan army would raise the institution's credibility and respect within Afghanistan, he said. The Turkish and Afghan armies already have well-established and long-standing historical ties to build upon.

ANKARA SUMMIT STILL ON, BUT DELAYS CONTINUE

16. (C) Spanta emphasized the importance Kabul attaches to the Ankara process, reportedly telling Babacan that the April 2006 Ankara summit was the first time the Afghans saw a positive signal from Pakistan. Halili told us that President Karzai agrees; the process matters, even if little substance has so far emerged from it. Sener said Gul spoke to President Musharraf four days ago to discuss the next summit, which the Turks had hoped to host April 9-10 -- dates which President Karzai has already accepted. President Musharraf reportedly told Gul that as soon as the new Pakistani government is formed (Parliament elected the new PM March 24) he will confirm his participation, though he plans to visit China first. Given the amount of preparation required and Musharraf's travel plans, May 2008 appears more likely for the next summit. In order to re-emphasize Turkey's commitment to Pakistan and help ensure the summit's success, FM Babacan is prepared to travel to Pakistan once the summit's dates are confirmed. Sener also told us that PM

Erdogan had spoken to PPP leader Zebari and PML-N leader Sharif two days earlier, stressing to them the same points Gul delivered to Pakistani politicians during his visit last December: your priority should be fighting terrorism and extremism; if animosity replaces cooperation, only the Pakistani people will lose. To the Turks, Musharraf remains a stabilizing figure -- "secular and enlightened" compared to other Pakistani politicians. Sener said Erdogan would soon call new Pakistan PM Gilani and again appeal for unity.

DOSTUM STRONGER

¶17. (C) According to Sener, Dostum did not come up during Spanta's meetings -- this subject having already been addressed by Babacan and President Karzai in Doha, February ¶16. Sener remarked, however, that Dostum got his "bread buttered" when Karzai went after him. Two thousand tribal elders have come down from the north to pledge their allegiance to Dostum, along with former military officers and parliamentarians. Turkey is advising Dostum to go north and become an honorary figure. Village delegates, Sener said, have already been chosen for a third Junbesh Congress, which Turkey is urging take place. Turkey is imploring Dostum not to stand for Junbesh chairman -- something Sener said he can, ironically, now do more easily since Kabul has stripped the honorary title he held in the central government. Dostum, according to Sener, is propped up by Pashtun nationalism, which has had the effect of unifying Uzbek, Turkmen and Tajik leaders, who believe that if Dostum goes down, they'll be next. A poor representation in the Afghan diplomatic corps and other government agencies and Pashtun migration to the north are two Turkic-Afghan grievances Sener cited.

¶18. (C) Halili said Dostum was raised, but indirectly. Spanta reiterated his belief that Turkey is a strong supporter of the Afghan central government. But the two sides reportedly discussed the perception that Turkey is siding with the Uzbeks over the central government and that such a perception could damage Turkey's reputation throughout the country. From Halili's perspective, Turkey has been balanced in its dealings with Dostum and has not favored the north over the rest of the country. Turkey's PRT in Wardak

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is evidence of that. Believing "a wise enemy is better than a stupid friend," he said that he has told President Karzai this and believes it would be beneficial for Turkey to help Dostum be strong, and to help those around Dostum be strong, but not at the expense of Kabul or other ethnic groups. He has advised Karzai not to ask the Turks to abandon Dostum, but to remain balanced in their approach and encourage him to contribute to the country's stability.

SPANTA'S HOMECOMING

¶19. (C) A 1981 graduate of the Ankara University Political Sciences Faculty, International Relations Department (a one-time Turkish foreign service breeding ground; MFA spokesman Levent Bilman and an Embassy Ankara POL FSN were Spanta's classmates), Spanta has close ties to Turkey. He speaks Turkish very fluently; translation was only present to accommodate lower ranking members of Spanta's delegation, and was mostly disregarded. He addressed Bosphorus University students in Istanbul, March 18, underscoring the depth of "historical solidarity" between Turkey and Afghanistan, but was heckled by a leftist student group denouncing him as an agent of U.S. imperialism and the representative of an occupied country. He told the students that the United States deserves thanks for ending Taliban rule. Reflecting on his student days, Spanta said he too was once anti-American (Halili called him a staunch Maoist in his youth), but now extends his appreciation to America, noting that 35 percent of Afghan students today are girls. Halili

told us that one of his main professional challenges is persuading Turks that Turkey is not fighting a U.S. war in Afghanistan and that Afghanistan is not under U.S. occupation, perceptions which he believes might contribute to Turkey's reluctance to actively engage in counter-terrorism operations there.

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